

## City Stories

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## TEACHERS' HANDBOOK

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## About this handbook

In this Teachers' Handbook we will guide you through the ideas, process and practicalities of using City Stories in your classroom. We will cover the concepts and methodology behind using stories, a Digital Escape Rooms (DER), creative writing, lesson plans and the task types available. There is also a step-by-step guide on turning a text into a DER. Whether you want to support your students by using one of our City Stories or creating your own DER the handbook is here to help you.

**Please note: you must only use images, text and audio that comply with EU GDPR and copyright law. The project team, partner organisations and their employees bear no responsibility for checking the legality of any images, text or audio used. Publishing a story, and therefore any image, text or audio does not imply such checks have been carried out.**

## The teaching methodology underlying City Stories

We have combined two elements to create an effective learning platform for language students - storytelling and Digital Escape Rooms (DERs). We have developed a modern, digital, interactive teaching resource that can be used at all levels of ability, both in a typical classroom context or online.

We take both traditional and contemporary stories from different regions of the EU and use these as the basis for developing resources designed to improve both language skills and intercultural awareness. We use Digital Escape Rooms as the foundation for activities that allow students to work their way through the stories and harvest the language they contain in a meaningful way.

### Stories

Rudyard Kipling once said: "If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten." This succinctly explains the power that good stories can have. They live long in our memories, as do many of their component parts: the setting, the characters, and the language they use. It is also true to say that storytelling has been a common feature of all human cultures throughout history. Stories from different cultures can also therefore be used as tools to foster intercultural understanding; and, as we all know, understanding is the foundation of empathy.

These are the sorts of considerations that inspired us to develop a project that builds on the power of stories. By using traditional or contemporary stories from different regions of Europe we can celebrate our cultural heritage and we can also begin to understand and appreciate our differences.

We also know that all learners find good stories motivating; everyone wants to know how the story unfolds, and that encourages learners to work their way through the language - and the tasks we provide - to reach the conclusion. The motivation is intrinsic.

### Tasks

The task types utilised in the City Stories DERs are those commonly associated with best practices in modern language teaching. There are 9 'basic' frameworks for tasks, but most can be adapted to include other types of typical tasks found in published material; for example, the multiple choice task can be used to create True / False questions.

In addition, the DERs are constructed in such a way that they can be used by individual students, and also by pairs or groups of students - even the whole class! Here our guiding principle has been the communicative approach where we give students the opportunity to ask, answer, discuss and decide whilst practising the target language. Throughout the entire journey of a DER students will need to engage with the material presented and then think about language in order to progress to the final room.

## Digital Escape Rooms

### What is a DER?

A Digital Escape Room (DER) is an exciting, interesting and engaging way to collaborate and learn. Typically, a DER has a set of tasks that the player has to complete in order to 'escape' the room; for the City Stories project each DER is a sequence of rooms that require solving to complete the entire story. Each room in a DER has two features - content (the story) and tasks (interactive activities).

### What about the tasks?

The content used in the DERs is in three different forms: text, audio and images. And the task (or tasks) in each room relate to the content. These tasks utilise a whole range of familiar activities, such as gap-fill, rewrite sentences in the correct order, choose correct answer, pattern identification, riddles, matching, categorising, etc, which lead to and encourage critical thinking. These kind of problem-solving activities have long been a part of language learning because they require the active participation of students, leading to increased motivation and better acquisition of learning aims and outcomes.

### What are the benefits of using a DER in the classroom?

There are several very useful advantages of using DERs:

- The format is clear and intuitive
- The content is broken down into manageable chunks
- The tasks are familiar allowing students to work and focus on what they are doing rather than how to do it
- At the same time it is challenging
- DERs can be done alone, in small groups or as the whole class
- This caters to large or mixed level groups as well as smaller groups or individuals
- It encourages critical thinking, collaboration and communication
- They can be used in a physical classroom, online, in hybrid or for self-study at home
- The City Stories DERs are compatible with computers and mobile devices

These advantages lead onto some key benefits for language learners:

- Recognizable improvement
- Increased motivation
- Sense of achievement

## Writing stories for the classroom

Is there anything more engaging than a good story?

Whether you are a child or an adult, from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, we tell stories to others and to ourselves. Children grow up listening to fairy tales, which makes it easier for them to understand the world and its principles. Later on in life, whenever we are faced with a complex issue or idea, if another person explains it to us through storytelling, we often understand it better. This level of interconnectedness that stories provide makes storytelling and creative writing useful tools in the classroom as well. From using fables and reading short stories and poems to telling anecdotes in class and giving examples from personal life, storytelling has numerous benefits. It helps students:

- Acquire new information
- Approach the topic critically
- Spark a debate
- Reduce monotony
- Increase motivation
- Boost your students' creativity
- Improve their understanding of the subject

In the case of the City Stories project, short stories are used as the basis for improving reading comprehension skills, revising and expanding vocabulary, and making students more culturally aware of the traditions and customs of a city, whether they live there or if it is one they would like to know more about. Stories describe the history and values of a particular group of people, therefore, delving into their destiny and traditions might help students build a sense of belonging to a certain community.

In this section we are going to talk briefly about creative writing with your students, however, the same ideas, principles and activities can be applied by you for your own stories.

### Getting Started

It is difficult to write a good story, but many of them are based on the same three act structure:

- An introduction (for example, a dragon starts terrorising a village and the local farms)
- Some kind of climax (a man sets out to defeat the dragon)
- Resolution of conflict (there is a victory, and village life begins again)

Apart from this simple structure that can be used to shape a story, it is important for students to have a clear concept of who their characters are and whether first or third person best fits the story. And there are activities and processes you can work through with them. Remember, the information you ask of them in the following tasks is going to depend on the idea you have in mind about the basic content of the story: the vocabulary you would like them to revise and grammar tenses you would like to focus on.

### Characters

You can start with an activity in which students have a blank sheet and write the name of their protagonist, one positive and one negative trait, their age, hobby, three words to describe how they look, their favourite food and so on. Choose the aspects that best fit with the type of story. You can tell

them that these elements will be used in their story (it helps to be specific here, that 5 of them must be used, or there will be a paragraph describing the character; don't ask students to write a lot of things that then do not get used in the story).

### Style

Students will need to choose the voice they deem fit for their story, first or third person. A simple discussion task can allow students to understand this: Is the focus on one character and how they perceive the world? Or do they need a more objective view that allows for multiple perspectives to be heard?

### Outline

Before writing students also need to know how long the story should be and how the structure fits into that. An important element that can really help students is deciding how many paragraphs are needed. Each story will be different and by asking them to spend a short time discussing the number of paragraphs required for each section will help shape the story in their minds before writing. Using the 3-act structure mentioned earlier, most stories will have a similar ratio to this 10-paragraph story:

- Introduction 3-4 paragraphs
- Main Body 4-5 paragraphs
- Resolution 2-3 paragraphs

By covering these basic steps and creating a relaxed environment, you are not only giving a chance to your students to discover something new about others and themselves, but to yourself as well, because you can get to know them better.

### Finding inspiration

Inspiration or basis for stories can be found anywhere: in songs, pictures, magazines, poems and other works of art. The world is a text and we all participate in creating the content. However, it is important to start small so that your students can get used to these types of tasks. For example, ask them to write down what they see or feel while listening to a piece of music, put into words a story that comes to mind when they are looking at a particular painting, describe their routine as a famous person etc.

Still, when it comes to a topic as broad as the stories belonging to a city, the task of writing a story might seem overwhelming. As always, good research is key. Stories rely heavily on their protagonists, so it is important to choose your characters wisely. Do not choose a plot that is too complicated or involves too many protagonists, because you might get lost in all that information and have trouble simplifying it. Focus on something that is close to your heart. Every teacher knows their students best, so finding a topic based on their preferences and interests should not be a problem. You can always give them a short questionnaire regarding the topics they would like to learn more about in your class.

The level of the story should definitely be a bit higher than the one your students are currently at: stories provide an excellent tool for scaffolding. By writing a story yourself, you can focus on the vocabulary you wish your students to revise, grammar patterns you would like them to consolidate, new phrases to learn that you deem useful for their future progress. The task of putting the sentences in order (provided within the City Stories platform) could really show their level of understanding and engagement. In fact, using stories as the basis for developing any kind of task will be more motivating to



them than giving tasks in isolation, since stories create emotional connectedness and provide meaningful context. They definitely should not be long, so that students do not feel overwhelmed. Another benefit of using stories like these in the classroom is that one story usually leads to another, so students might be asked to engage with the text even further: for example, rewrite it from a different character's perspective or think of a different ending.

On the other hand, your students could write their own city story as well. While exploring different elements of their culture, you can help them identify some key points that might inspire them to write about their community. It is usually easier to build on existing information instead of inventing a completely new plot of your own. This process might also give students the opportunity to improve their skills of understanding and summarizing the main ideas, while putting them in a slightly different context, or using them to modernize the plot.

### Getting started

In conclusion, the majority of students are usually apprehensive when it comes to writing – they perceive it as either tedious or too complicated. By “sneaking in” simple writing activities connected to their interests, and slowly expanding on them in time, you will probably succeed in getting your students to complete writing tasks more willingly. The tasks could range from describing a weekday (such as Monday) as a person, to unearthing a story of two star-crossed lovers from the sixteenth century in order to rewrite their destiny; the possibilities are endless. Of course, some students might say that they are not creative; however, this type of writing does not necessarily involve creativity, but a lot of research and guidance instead. This requires a lot of experimenting and preparation on the teacher's part, but it also makes it more exciting. Stories are everywhere: on social media, in books, in families, in the classroom. You just need to find the right one and encourage your students to do the same. Not everyone can be a writer, but writing will definitely help students focus better, improve vocabulary, and get in touch with their true feelings about a particular topic and themselves.

## How to turn a story into a DER

### General information

Note: throughout this section the word ‘story’ is used. However, any text can be used to create a DER on any subject, indeed in any language. Because the original DERs all came from local stories, that is how the process is described here.

Furthermore, this chapter assumes you already have identified a piece of material or written a story that you want to turn into a DER. If you want to, or ask your students to, write a story then see the section on creative writing elsewhere in this teacher’s guide.

### Content

There are three different input types:

- Text
- Audio

- Image

It is possible to have all three in any one room of the DER, though beware of overloading your students with information.

Most creators find it best to focus primarily on one type of input for the story and use the other two to enhance the students' experience.

## Structure

You have your story and have decided on your main form of input (for ease we will assume you are using a text with some images to support it), what are the next steps? In brief, the simplest sequence of steps is:

1. Divide your story into sections.
2. Decide how these sections best interact with each other.
3. Select a task type for each piece of content.
4. Write the task.
5. Enter the content and tasks into the 'Story Editor'
6. Share!

Let's look at these in more detail.

### **1. Divide your story into sections.**

For a simple story this will typically mean dividing into paragraphs as these are already natural breaks in the text. Remember that whilst lower levels usually find it easier to work with shorter texts and higher levels can cope with more extended pieces, this does not mean you cannot have a longer paragraph for an A2 level DER, or a one-sentence input for advanced learners to work from.

A second aspect to consider when dividing the text is that you will normally have at least one task for each piece of input. You will find some parts of the text more naturally lend themselves to tasks than others.

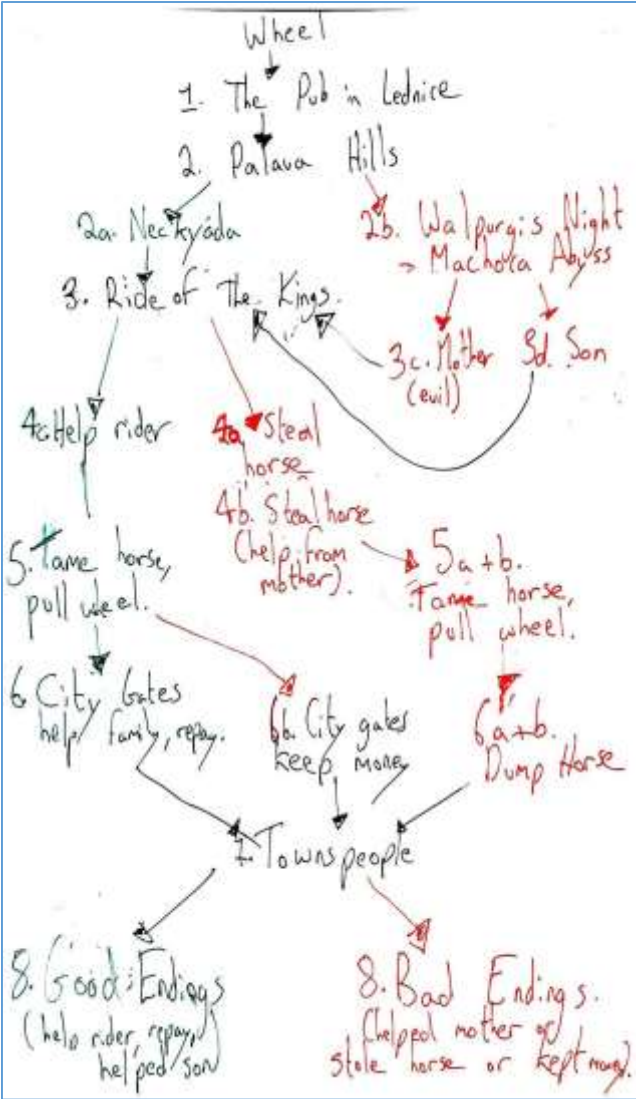
Taken together this means that most stories, and therefore DERs, will have between 8 and 15 sections, which then translate into rooms in the DER.

### **2. Decide how these sections best interact with each other.**

There are two basic ways for the sections of a story to interact with each other, and for students to interact with the story - linear and as a maze. And it is entirely possible to combine the two. Most stories will be linear, although adding a maze element in that is not difficult. For linear stories the most important planning stage is dividing the text into sections as the interaction pattern is simple.

<b>Linear</b>	A <b>linear DER</b> is one where each <b>room</b> is unlocked in sequential fashion; e.g. you start in Room 1 and after completing the task, Room 2 is unlocked, and then Room 3 and so on.
<b>Maze</b>	There are many interconnected <b>rooms</b> (although not all will necessarily have <b>tasks</b> in) and the reader chooses their own path through the <b>DER</b> .

However, if using a maze, then we recommend using a flowchart to map the text as this will make the process of entering everything into the story editor much easier. Below you can see the original map used for the story [Wheel of Misfortune](#) written by Eoin Digne. You can see that at two points early in the story, first in Room 2 *Palava Hills*, and then again in Room 3 *Ride of the Kings* the reader will either continue in the black story or switch to the red. The map was invaluable when transferring the story into the story editor.



This story also has multiple possible endings based on earlier decisions, something that would not have been possible without mapping the story into the flowchart.

To give you another practical example, one of the available stories is a maze adventure with no tasks other than making decisions throughout the story, each of which leads the reader down their own path. It is a create-your-own horror adventure for teens called [KANEKGD - the school trip](#) and was actually written by a group of six Czech girls aged 13 and 14. The map they made filled the whole whiteboard!

### 3. Select a task type for each piece of content.

The story editor allows for a range of different task types, and there is flexibility within those.

#### Multiple choice

- Only one correct answer is possible
- Options and answer can be an image or text
- “Yes / No” and “True / False” questions can be utilised here

#### Drag and drop

- Can be used for putting words in the correct order for making sentences
- Can be used for placing letters in the correct order for spelling words

#### Gap fill

- Multiple gaps in single sentence are possible
- Correct answers can be a single word or multiple words
- Answers are case sensitive; it is recommended to inform readers of this in the instructions

#### Rewrite sentences

- Can be used for putting words in the correct order for making sentences
- There is pedagogical value in actual rewriting

#### Scrambled text

- Students use arrows to put the text in the correct order
- Can be used for sequencing summarised events, instructions or text to continue the story

#### Order images

- Again students use arrows, this time to put images in the correct order
- Can be used for sequencing events, or recognising when items were mentioned in the text

#### Question with multiple answers

- Students must click *Submit* after entering each answer
- Can be used for finding items in the text, e.g. a set of related vocabulary

### **Matching exercise**

- Students click on items to match content from the two boxes
- Can be used for lots of different vocabulary exercises, including definitions, collocations and synonyms

### **Classifications**

- Students drag and drop items from a box into the correct column
- Can be used to find five adjectives, five verbs, etc.
- Can be used for an exam-style multiple-matching exercise

## **4. Write the task.**

When writing tasks keep the following points in mind:

- You know your students.
- You know your strengths.
- The DER / lesson as a whole should have a clear, identifiable learning outcome, and tasks should be designed to help students achieve this.
- Each task should also work by itself, either to help students understand the text they have just read or listened to; or to help them understand a piece of language.
- Keep each task simple. There is lots of space for complexity through the input, or the number and variety of tasks in each room and throughout the DER.
- Always keep in mind the age, culture and level of your students.
- Watch out! Be careful not to write tasks that are best done individually if you want your students to collaborate; and vice versa, tasks that are for pairs or groups should be avoided in a DER that is to be done by students individually.

One of the great benefits of the way the story editor has been designed is that it allows teachers to write tasks for different levels from the same piece of content. To do this simply put two separate tasks in the same room, one for each broad 'level' of students in your class. Once each group has answered their task they can either attempt the other task or share the answer so that they can move on through the DER.

## **5. Enter the content and tasks into the 'Story Editor'**

This is where you create your Digital Escape Room. See the step-by-step section in this Teachers' Handbook for guidance on how to do this.

## **6. Share!**

Your story can be submitted for publishing for public view on the City Stories website (covered in the step-by-step section of this chapter). Published stories can be accessed by anyone, even if they are not registered on the City Stories platform. However, you can use your personal, unpublished stories with your students by creating a public link. To do this, simply go to the *Preview* section of the editor and click

on the *PUBLIC LINK* button in the top right corner. Your browser will automatically take you to the public link for the story, so you need to copy the link from the browser address bar.

You can now share this link directly with your students or even on your social media. Anyone with this link will be able to access your story, so please make sure your content is appropriate for your audience. Please note that City Stories project partners are not responsible for any of the content presented in your stories.

## How to write lesson plans for DERs

### Publishing info

We have brought together all the basic information a teacher needs to be able to use a DER with a class in one place under the *Publishing info* tab. Here you will find the story outline, the lesson plan - including aims and activity suggestions - and any other comments the creator wishes to share.

### Story Pitch

This is a short and simple introduction to the story. In this section you should briefly say what the story is about and, when relevant, who it might appeal to. For published stories this information will appear with the image on the website.

### Lesson Plan

This should give a teacher a clear but short overview of the lesson with some options on how to further develop the content.

### Main language aims

It is recommended that if one piece of language is focused on, or repeatedly appears, it is clearly stated here. It is also fine to put more general items. Areas that could be covered include:

- Grammatical points, for example
  - Tenses
  - Modal verbs
  - Sentence formation
- Vocabulary, for example
  - Specified in one area (e.g. architecture, animals)
  - Phrasal verbs
  - Collocations
  - Idioms
  - Learning words from context
- Traditional skills
  - Reading
  - Writing
  - Listening
  - Speaking

- 21st century skills
  - Creativity
  - Collaboration
  - Critical thinking
  - Communication

### Suggestions for pre-DER activities

We recommend that any pre-DER activities help the students in one or more of the following areas as an introduction to:

- The history, culture or context of the DER
- Any key ideas or concepts in the DER
- New (or potentially new) key vocabulary from the DER

The type of activity that might work well for the first two would be:

- Discussions
- Research
- Relating personal experience
- Picture prompts

### Possible follow-up activities

We believe that the follow-up activities that work best engage the students personally in what they have just read and allow them to relate to it personally. Activities could be:

- A group discussion
- What would you do if....?
- Research and write / present
- Find out more (through video, photos etc)
- Describe a character / place / event from the story
- Poster featuring key points to remember (people, events, vocabulary)
- What happens next?

### Additional comments

This is a good place to put in something that is interesting and connected, but not necessarily relevant to the story or DER. This is the perfect location for any links, for example to related videos or places of inspiration. Some of the things you might put here include:

- Credit and citations for any sources
- Links to the source or author of a text you have used
- Links to related videos, articles, blogs etc.
- Ideas for further study or class discussion
- Who created the DER (especially if it was your students!)

### Cover photo

This is required for published stories and will be the first thing users see when they come across your story on the web site along with the Story Pitch. The image should be clear and be related to the DER.

**Please note: you must only use images, text and audio that comply with EU GDPR and copyright law. The project team, partner organisations and their employees bear no responsibility for checking the legality of any images, text or audio used. Publishing a story, and therefore any image, text or audio does not imply such checks have been carried out.**

### Publishing status

Once you have created a DER you have two choices:

1. Share it by clicking on *Preview* and sharing the link in the URL.
  - a. This DER will be private to you and those you share it with, e.g. students
  - b. The project team, partner organisations and their employees bear no responsibility for the content of the DER
  
2. Submit the DER for publishing on the City Stories website.
  - a. The DER will be checked by the project team and, provided it is suitable, published on the City Stories website for anybody to use
  - b. DERs will only be published if we feel they meet our standards regarding offensive, discriminatory or illegal content. Where DERs do not meet these standards for publication, the DER will either be simply rejected, or you will be informed of the issue and given the opportunity to remedy it and resubmit; the project team will not explain or enter into correspondence regarding the decision

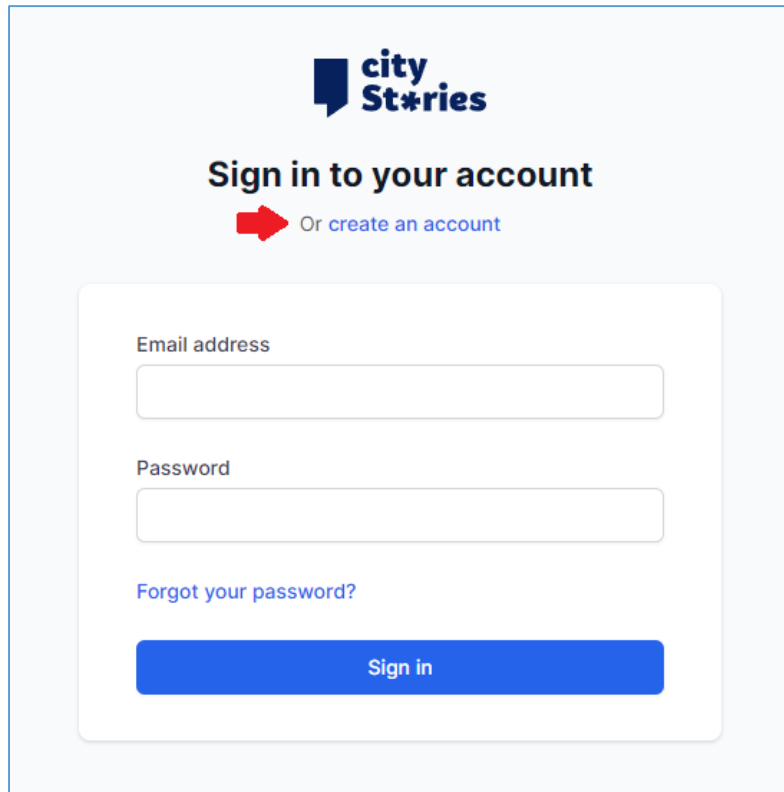


## Using the City Stories platform: step-by-step instructions

### Creating a user account

Follow these steps to create a new user account:

- Open your web browser (we recommend using Google Chrome) and go to: <https://citystories.amber-it.co/>
- Click on “create an account” link

A screenshot of the City Stories sign-in page. At the top, the City Stories logo is displayed. Below the logo, the text "Sign in to your account" is centered. Underneath, there is a red arrow pointing right, followed by the text "Or create an account". The main content area is a white box with rounded corners containing two input fields: "Email address" and "Password". Below the password field is a link that says "Forgot your password?". At the bottom of the white box is a blue button with the text "Sign in".

- Enter your name, email and desired password. Confirm your password in the appropriate field and click “NEXT”
- Read our *Privacy policy* and *Terms of service* and check the appropriate box. Click “REGISTER”
- Check your email for a verification code (if it doesn’t appear in your inbox, check your Spam folder); then enter it into the appropriate box and click “CONFIRM”
- Once verification is complete, click “GO TO DASHBOARD”

Congratulations! You now have an account with the City Stories platform.

### Creating stories

To create a new story, go to the *Stories* tab in the left-hand menu. In this tab, you will see:

- All of your personal stories

- Stories created by others that have been approved for publishing by the City Stories team

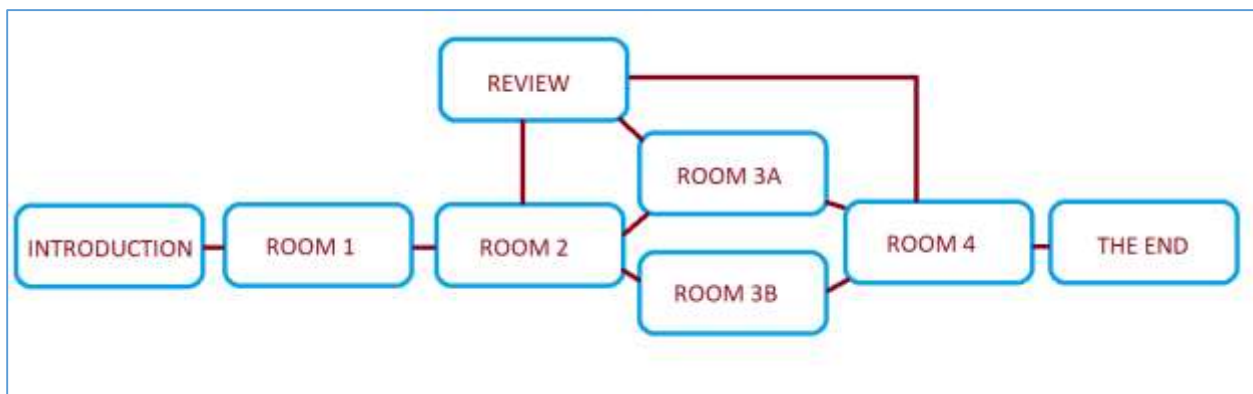
To create a new story, click on the *NEW* button in the top right corner.

Basic information:

- Enter story title
- Choose the language of the story
- Choose one or more CEFR levels appropriate for the story
- Click *SAVE*

You will now have a number of tabs available. The two tabs relevant for story creation are *Rooms* and *Storyline*. City Stories are based on the Digital Escape Room concept, meaning that users will progress from one room to another by solving one or more tasks in each room. Progression through the story can be linear or non-linear. The *Rooms* tab allows you to create individual rooms containing both content and tasks. The *Storyline* tab allows you define the story progression (i.e. movement from one room to another).

As described in the section on how to turn a story into a DER, we recommend mapping out your story on a piece of paper to create a draft, which will guide you through the process of creating rooms and defining the storyline. For example:



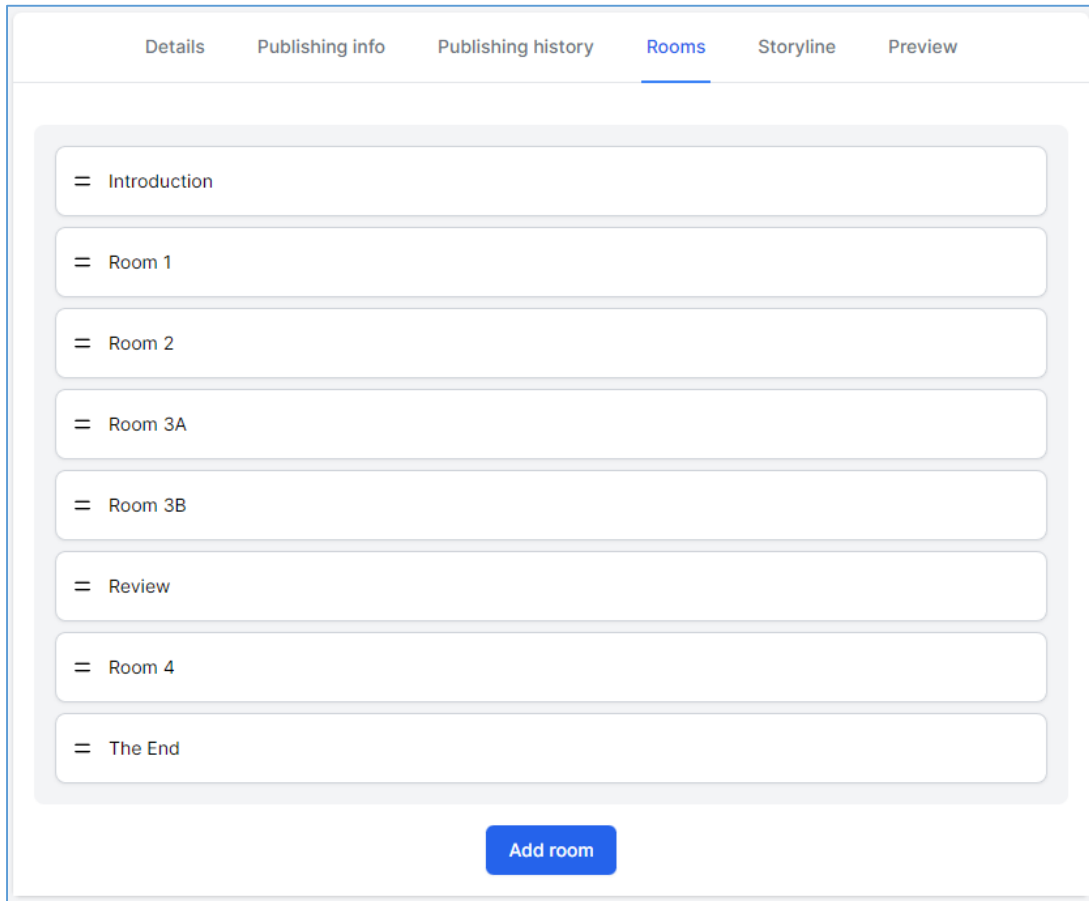
Once you are ready to start adding your content, go to the *Rooms* tab and click on the *ADD ROOM* button. This will create the first room of your story:

Details Publishing info Publishing history **Rooms** Storyline Preview

= Introduction

Add room

At this point, you can start editing the content of your first room. Alternatively, if you have your entire story mapped out, you can create all of your rooms at once.



Note that these rooms were added according to the diagram we created earlier.

### Adding content and tasks

Clicking on the first room (Introduction) will open the interface for building the content of that particular room. You have three tabs within this interface:



- Details – allows you to change the room name
- Content – this is where you add the content that will be displayed to users when they “enter” the room
- Tasks – this is where you create tasks that users need to solve before progressing to the next room

The room does not necessarily need to have tasks. In fact, we usually create our Introduction rooms with content only. To add content, go to the *Content* tab and click on the *ADD CONTENT* button. When adding the content, you can choose between text, image or audio (*Type* drop-down menu) as well as define the width of that content. Let’s start by adding some text at half width:

### Add content

Type  Width

Text

**B** *I* U  

Welcome to the **City Stories** platform. This story will guide you towards creating a Digital Escape Room experience for your students. In this story, we will learn:

- how to add content to our rooms
- how to create a storyline
- how to preview our story
- how to share the story with our students

A simple text editor allows you to use bold, italic or underline text, add a bulleted list and add hyperlinks.

Once you save your content, a preview option will automatically become available in the *Content* tab:

### Room

[Back to room list](#)

Details **Content** Tasks

≡ Text (Half width)

#### Preview

Welcome to the **City Stories** platform. This story will guide you towards creating a Digital Escape Room experience for your students. In this story, we will learn:


- how to add content to our rooms
- how to create a storyline
- how to preview our story
- how to share the story with our students

We can now add some additional content to this same room:

### Add content

Type  Width

Image



Upload an image or drag and drop  
PNG, JPG up to 10MB

In this case, we added an image at half width. Because both types of content were added at half width, the platform automatically placed them one next to another, as can be seen in the preview section:

Details Content Tasks


≡ Text (Half width)

≡ Image (Half width)

#### Preview

Welcome to the **City Stories** platform. This story will guide you towards creating a Digital Escape Room experience for your students. In this story, we will learn:

- how to add content to our rooms
- how to create a storyline
- how to preview our story
- how to share the story with our students



You can play around with different content types and widths to see the resulting alignment and get the desired visual structure of your content.

Now that we have completed adding our content to the first room, we can either start adding tasks, or go back to the previous screen.

There are a total of **nine task types** you can use in the task builder tool. Although these were initially designed for language teaching purposes, they are fairly generic and can be used for any educational purpose. These task types are:

- Multiple choice
- Drag and drop
- Gap fill
- Rewrite sentence
- Scrambled text
- Order images
- Question with multiple answers
- Matching exercise
- Classification

In addition, these task types can be modified to provide alternative variations of the tasks. For example, a TRUE/FALSE task can be created by using multiple choice type with two possible answers (*true* and *false*). We will cover each individual task type with variations and suggestions on how to use them properly. To start adding tasks, from the room interface go into the *Tasks* tab and click on *ADD TASK* button.

### **General comments**

- Each task must have a title. We will see where this title is displayed in the “Previewing a story” section of this chapter.
- Choose the appropriate task type from the drop-down menu on the right
- Instructions are not a mandatory field. Depending on the task type and content provided, you may or may not need to add instructions.
- Click on the “Show room content” button below to display the room content while creating the task.
- Task preview will become available as soon as all mandatory components of the task have been added.

### **Multiple choice**

These are standard MPC tasks with a single question and multiple answers, one of which is correct. The City Stories platform allows adding either text or photos as possible answers.

Examine the image below to see how MPC tasks are created:

## Create task

[Back to task list](#)

**Title**

**Type**

Multiple choice
▼

**Instructions**

---

**Question text**

**Answer type**

Text
▼

**Answers**

=	five	<input type="checkbox"/>	Correct	
=	seven	<input type="checkbox"/>	Correct	
=	nine	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Correct	
=	eleven	<input type="checkbox"/>	Correct	

Add answer

- Multiple choice task type was selected
- No instructions were entered – as MPC task type always contains an actual question, there is usually no need to add additional instructions
- The question was entered in the “Question text” field
- The answer type was selected as text (as mentioned, it can also be images)
- Four different answers were added using the *ADD ANSWER* button. We can add more possible answers using the same button, or delete existing answers using the trash can button on the right hand side
- One answer (“nine”) was selected as correct

Once all the elements of the task have been entered properly, a preview option appears below the task editor:

**Task preview**

**Task types** Not completed ^

How many tasks types are available on the City Stories platform?

five

seven

nine

eleven

**Submit**

As mentioned earlier, MPC tasks can also be used to create classic TRUE/FALSE exercises. To make the task slightly more challenging a third option such as 'We don't know' could be added.

MPC tasks are also suitable for reading comprehension exercises as usually seen on standardized exams, such as the Cambridge Assessment English exams. In the following example, the room content was a piece of text with numbered gaps:

Details **Content** Tasks

≡ Text (Full width)

**Add content**

**Preview**

Fishing has (1) \_\_\_\_\_ been an integral part of Croatian culture, but also a very important (2) \_\_\_\_\_. Unfortunately, the mentality of the locals has not changed much (3) \_\_\_\_\_ ancient times even though their tools have become better and deadlier, (4) \_\_\_\_\_ for the catch to become easy and plentiful. (5) \_\_\_\_\_ fishing is a well-known concept, but the most commonly ignored globally. The Adriatic is facing the same fate as many other world seas, with the majority of our fish being driven to (6) \_\_\_\_\_.



Subsequently, the author created six corresponding tasks labeled (1) – (6). Each of these tasks was an MPC question with same question text: “Choose the word that best fits the gap in the text above”. An example is shown below:

The screenshot shows a question editor interface. At the top, there is a 'Title' field containing '(1)' and a 'Type' dropdown menu set to 'Multiple choice'. Below this is an 'Instructions' field. A dashed horizontal line separates the top section from the 'Question text' and 'Answer type' section. The 'Question text' field contains 'Choose the word that best fits the gap in the text above' and the 'Answer type' dropdown is set to 'Text'. Underneath, the 'Answers' section lists four options: 'never', 'sometimes', 'always', and 'ever'. Each option has an equals sign to its left, a 'Correct' toggle switch, and a trash icon. The 'always' option is selected, with its toggle switch turned on. At the bottom center, there is a blue 'Add answer' button.

The user needs to solve all six tasks in order to continue to the next stage of the story.

### Drag and drop

Drag and drop tasks can be used in two ways:

- create a piece of text using a pool of words or phrases; or
- complete a piece of text by dragging individual words or phrases to the correct spot.

To further examine both variations, and show how these tasks are formed, we will use the examples below.

*Variant 1: forming sentences using words or phrases*

Title		Type	
<input type="text" value="Digital Escape Rooms"/>		<input type="text" value="Drag drop"/>	
Instructions			
<input type="text" value="Use words from the box below to form a sentence"/>			
-----			
Parts			
=	<input type="text" value="Digital"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="escape"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="room"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="uses"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="technology"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="to run"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="through"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="the scenarios"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="to solve"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
=	<input type="text" value="the puzzle."/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Draggable	<input type="button" value="🗑️"/>
<input type="button" value="Add part"/>			

In this example, each word (or in some cases a group of words) is marked as “draggable”. The instruction reads “Use the words from the box below to form a sentence”. The resulting task will look like this:

## Digital Escape Rooms

Not completed ^

Use words from the box below to form a sentence

to solve

the scenarios

Digital

to run

escape

uses

through

room

the puzzle.

technology

Submit

Users have to drag each of the words or phrases in the light blue boxes into the space provided above to form the correct sentence.

Please take note of chosen word groups:

- to solve
- to run
- the scenarios
- the puzzle

This was done because the words “to” and “the” are found twice in the sentence. Our software cannot recognize that these are the same words; instead, it sees them as distinct items that should go into specific positions. Therefore, you have to either avoid using the same word twice, or you can group them together with other words, to ensure that they are placed correctly.

*Variant 2: completing sentences with words or phrases*

We can now look at the exact same task but with slight modifications:

Parts

=	Digital	<input type="checkbox"/>	Draggable	
=	escape	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Draggable	
=	room uses technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	Draggable	
=	to run	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Draggable	
=	through the scenarios to solve the puzzle.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Draggable	

Note that this time we only selected two words (or groups of words) as “draggable”. The task will now look like this:

Digital Escape Rooms Not completed ^

---

Use words from the box below to form a sentence

Digital room uses technology through the scenarios to  
solve the puzzle.

to run
escape

Submit

This time, instead of dragging all the words to form a sentence, user will only have two boxes with words (or groups of words) that need to be dragged into the correct position in the space above.

## Gap fill

Again, you can use the gap fill task type to create a number of different language exercises. Let's examine the following example:

Title	Type
<input type="text" value="Free time"/>	<input type="text" value="Gap fill"/>
Instructions	
<input type="text" value="Fill in the gaps with the appropriate words or phrases"/>	
-----	
Text	
<input type="text" value="John likes to spend his free time"/>	
Answers:	
<input type="text" value="on"/>	<input type="button" value="-"/> <input type="button" value="+"/>
Text	
<input type="text" value="his boat."/>	
<input type="button" value="Add answers"/> <input type="button" value="Remove part"/>	

This is the simplest use of the gap-fill task; we added a part of the sentence, a gap that needs to be filled with the correct answer (in this case "on"), followed by the remaining part of the sentence. The task will look like this:

Free time	Not completed ^
Fill in the gaps with the appropriate words or phrases	
John likes to spend his free time <input type="text"/> his boat.	
<input type="button" value="Submit"/>	

We can now easily expand on this exercise by adding additional text and additional answers:

Title	Free time	Type	Gap fill
Instructions	Fill in the gaps with the appropriate words or phrases		
Text	John likes to spend his free time		
Answers:	on	-	+
Text	his boat. He prefers fishing		
Answers:	but	-	+
Text	will also sometimes simply go for a swim in a remote cove.		
		Add answers	Remove part

In this case, the user needs to correctly fill in both gaps in order to proceed with the story:

Task preview
Free time <span>Not completed ^</span>
Fill in the gaps with the appropriate words or phrases
John likes to spend his free time <input type="text"/> his boat. He prefers fishing
<input type="text"/> will also sometimes simply go for a swim in a remote cove.
<input type="button" value="Submit"/>

Note the "+" and "-" buttons next to the answers in both of these cases. Sometimes, there can be more than one correct word or phrase that fits into the gap. It is very important to add all possible answers to

each gap; otherwise, users can provide an answer that is correct but has not been considered by the author of the story (which can be confusing or demotivating for users). By using the plus button, we can add multiple correct answers for each gap.

Another use of gap fill questions for creating a traditional language exercise is presented below:

Title	Irregular verbs		Type	Gap fill		
Instructions	Write the simple past version of each irregular verb in the gap next to it					
Text	draw -					
Answers:	drew		-	+		
Text	; dream -					
Answers:	dreamt		dreamed		-	+
Text	; drink -					
Answers:	drank		-	+		
Text	; drive -					
Answers:	drove		-	+		
Text	; bring -					
Answers:	brought		-	+		
<span>Add text</span> <span>Remove part</span>						

The task will look like this:

### Task preview

#### Irregular verbs

Not completed ^

Write the simple past version of each irregular verb in the gap next to it

draw -  ; dream -  ; drink -  
 ; drive -  ; bring -

Please note that:

- two possible answers were added for the verb “dream” (as both are correct)
- hyphens and semicolons were added to text parts; while this is not necessary, it makes task formatting much more user-friendly

The use of gap fill tasks is only limited by imagination. The combination of fixed text entries and gaps with single or multiple correct answers (which can be either words or phrases) can be used to create any number of different language exercises.

### Rewrite the sentence

The pedagogical value of rewriting sentences has been documented through numerous research projects conducted by both language teaching professionals and students. Rewriting texts is a good tool for improving writing skills and grammar.

Setting up a rewriting task is very simple:

- input scrambled text
- input correct text

Users are presented with the scrambled text and are required to enter the correct sentence in a space provided. While this may be similar to *variant 1* of the drag and drop tasks, the additional value of these tasks comes from the fact that users actually have to type in every word correctly, which helps with the memorization of words and spelling.

Note: authors should ensure that the list of scrambled words has only one possible correct way of forming them into a sentence.



## Create task

[Back to task list](#)

Title  Type

Instructions

---

Scrambled sentence

Answer

### Task preview

Another type of language exercise Not completed

Rewrite words to form a meaningful sentence.

platform City provides possibilities teaching Stories many

Answer

### Scrambled text

In this task type, users are provided with scrambled sentences or paragraphs that they need to place into the correct order to recreate the original story.

To set up a scrambled text task, begin by choosing a piece of text. You can either use shorter texts in which users will be reordering individual sentences, or you can choose longer stories, in which case users could be reordering entire paragraphs. Creating the task is very simple – break the text down into any number of segments (created by clicking on the *ADD PART* button):

Title: Reading comprehension

Type: Scrambled text

Instructions: Reorder paragraphs to create a story

Parts:

- The idea for a City Stories platform came from Dave Cleary, DoS at IH Brno.
- Dave has been interested in the idea of creating Digital Escape Rooms for language teaching for some time.
- A call-for-proposals within the Erasmus KA2 program allowed him to turn his idea into a project proposal.
- As an added value, Dave also included the creative writing and cultural heritage components to his proposal.

Add part

Each of these segments will be provided to users as a separate piece of text, randomly scrambled by the platform:

Reading comprehension Not completed

Reorder paragraphs to create a story

- A call-for-proposals within the Erasmus KA2 program allowed him to turn his idea into a project proposal.
- Dave has been interested in the idea of creating Digital Escape Rooms for language teaching for some time.
- The idea for a City Stories platform came from Dave Cleary, DoS at IH Brno.
- As an added value, Dave also included the creative writing and cultural heritage components to his proposal.

Submit

Users use the arrow keys on the right-hand side to move pieces of text up and down. The task will be solved once all segments are placed in the correct order.

### Order images

This task type can be set up to create an excellent reading comprehension or listening exercise. To set it up properly, choose a piece of text (for reading comprehension) or an audio file (for listening) and add it as room content.

### Update content

Delete content  

Type: Text      Width: Full

Text

**B I U**    ☰    🔗

John was riding his bike down the old country road. Suddenly, a bear came out of the woods and started crossing the road, blocking his path. John pressed on his front break so hard that he ended up flying in the air over his bike.


Cancel    Save

Then add an 'order images' task by placing a selection of images in the order that represents the content storyline:

Title: What happened?      Type: Order images

Instructions: Put following images into correct order based on the story above.

Parts






=      🗑️

Users will be presented with the content (text or audio) and the randomly scrambled images. As in the scrambled text tasks, they have to use arrow keys on the right to place the images into the correct order.

What happened?

Put following images into correct order based on the story above.



Submit

## Questions with multiple answers

In this task type, we define a question that has multiple answers. Users are required to complete all answers in order to proceed. Look at the following example:

### Preview

My father and I don't have that kind of patience these days. Our longline is only 120-hook, but it still gives us plenty of time to spend with each other. It takes him about 30 minutes to bait it, while I slowly take us to the desired spot while trolling at the same time. Trolling will sometimes catch us some *bonito*, sometimes a *saddled seabream*. Most times nothing... But a longline rarely fails and provides a whole range of fish, depending on the type of terrain where it's cast. If cast in shallow waters on a rocky basin, we will most likely catch some *monkfish* or *gilt-headed seabream*. If we choose deeper waters and mud, we will go home with stingrays (which never even came close in size to the one from the stories about my grandfather), a *hake*, or even an occasional shark. Don't worry, sharks in the Adriatic are not dangerous in any way, not a single species of the 54 that live in our waters.

In this case, the room content is a piece of text that makes reference to a number of fish species. The task is set up in a following way:

Title  Type

Instructions

---

Question   Case sensitive

Answers

<input type="text" value="bonito"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>
<input type="text" value="saddled seabream"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>
<input type="text" value="monkfish"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>
<input type="text" value="gilt-headed seabream"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>
<input type="text" value="stingray"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>
<input type="text" value="hake"/>	<input type="button" value="🗑"/>

- Task type “Question with multiple answers” is selected;
- Question entered was “Write down the species of fish found in the text above.” (making a reference to the room content);
- Six distinct answers were added using the *ADD ANSWER* button;
- Note that you can also mark answers as *CASE SENSITIVE*, in which case writing answers in lower case or capital letters will matter in determining whether the answer is correct.

Users are provided a box to type in their answer. The “Correct answers” section will indicate their progress (i.e. how many correct answers they have typed in out of the total number). Again, they have to submit all possible answers before proceeding.

**Fish species**
Not completed
^

---

Write down species of fish found in the text above. HINT: a certain family of fish does not count as "species" ;)

Correct answers: 2 / 6  
 Answers: bonito, monkfish

Type answers

Submit

### Matching exercise

In this type of exercise, users have to match words or phrases from the box on the left to words or phrases in the box on the right. To set up a matching exercise:

- Begin by selecting “Matching exercise” as task type;
- Recommended: add an instruction (e.g. “Please match the words on the left with their corresponding definitions.”);
- Keep adding pairs of words or phrases to be matched by clicking on the *ADD PAIR* button.

An example of a properly set up matching exercise along with the user view is provided in the image below:

Title

Definitions

Type

Matching exercise

Instructions

Please match words on the left with their corresponding definitions.

Pairs

training

the action of teaching a person or animal a partic



a task

a piece of work to be done or undertaken



a question

a sentence worded or expressed so as to elicit in



a story

an account of imaginary or real people and event



Add pair

Task preview

Definitions

Not completed



Please match words on the left with their corresponding definitions.

training

a task

a question

a story

a piece of work to be done or undertaken

an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment

a sentence worded or expressed so as to elicit information

the action of teaching a person or animal a particular skill or type of behavior

Submit

## Classification


In the Classification task type, you can define one or more classes of words or phrases, and add one or more items for each class type. A common classification task is to provide a list of words and ask users to split them into verbs, nouns, etc. To set up a classification exercise:

- Begin by selecting the “Classification” task type;
- Recommended: add an instruction (e.g. “Match the following words with their classes”);
- Define your first class by adding a “title”;
- Add one or more answers by pressing the *ADD ANSWER* button;
- Add more classes by pressing the *ADD ANSWER CLASS* button and repeat the same process to add answers to this class.


Title: Verbs and nouns      Type: Classification


Instructions: Match following words with their classes.


---

Class title: Verbs      


Answers:

swim      


run      


hike      


[Add answer](#)

Class title: Nouns      

Answers:

sea      

road      

forrest      

[Add answer](#)

[Add answer class](#)



Users will be provided with all the answers and will have to match them with their corresponding classes before they can progress with the story.

### Verbs and nouns

Not completed ^

Match following words with their classes.

sea hike run road swim

Verbs

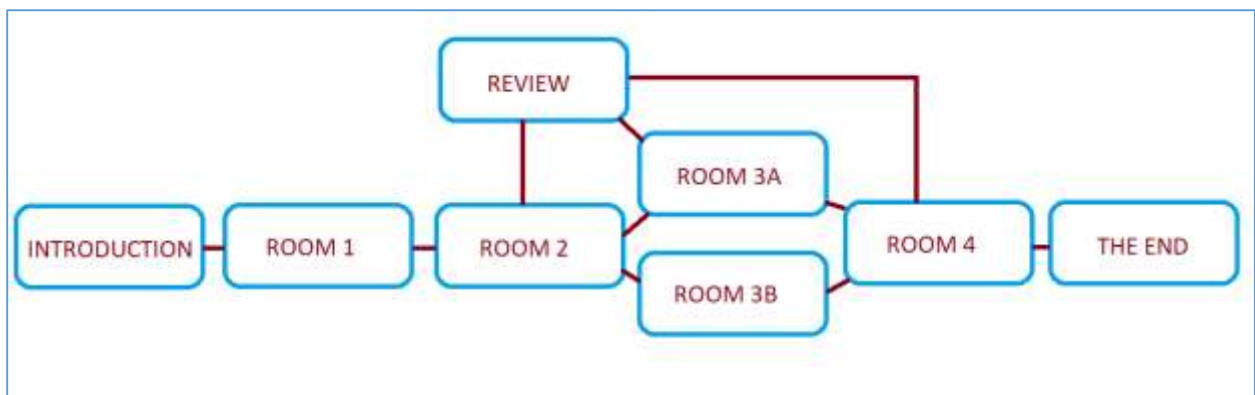
Nouns

forrest

Submit

### Creating a storyline

Once we have added content and tasks to all of our rooms, it is time to create a storyline. Let's review the story diagram we created at the beginning of this chapter:



As mentioned previously, a story progression does not necessarily have to be linear. If we look at this story diagram, we will see that the story has a linear progression up to ROOM 2. However, at that point, the story can either branch to ROOM 3A or ROOM 3B. If we go to ROOM 3B, the story continues with a linear progression all the way to the end. However, if we go to ROOM 3A, from there we can either choose a linear progression onto ROOM 4, or we can go to the REVIEW room. Once in the REVIEW room, we can circle back to ROOM 2 or continue with the progression to ROOM 4.

Let's examine how to create this particular storyline:

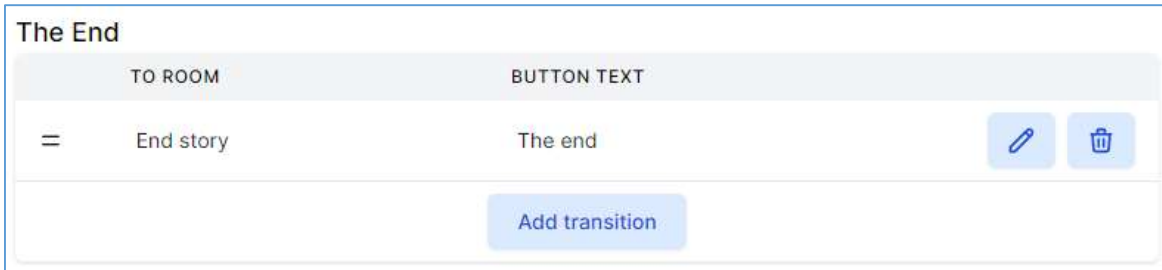
- From your *Story* interface, go to the *Storyline* tab;
- Look at the entire room layout. If you wish to change the sequence of some rooms, you can do that by going back to the *Rooms* tab and dragging individual rooms up or down using the two-lines button on the left;
- For your first room (in this case INTRODUCTION) click on the *ADD TRANSITION* button;
- You can now choose which room we are moving to, as well as the text that will be displayed in a button that users need to press in order to proceed. In our example, we are moving from the INTRODUCTION room to ROOM 1 (single transition). Therefore, from the drop-down menu, we will select ROOM 1 in the *TO ROOM* box, and add a simple transition text "Continue";

The screenshot shows a configuration window titled "Introduction". It has two columns: "TO ROOM" and "BUTTON TEXT". Under "TO ROOM", there is a dropdown menu with "Room 1" selected. Under "BUTTON TEXT", there is a text input field containing "Continue". To the right of the text input are two buttons: a checkmark and an 'X'. Below these fields is a blue button labeled "Add transition".

- Complete the first transition by clicking on the checkmark button on the right;
- The same process will be repeated for all linear transitions. However, once we get to ROOM 2, we can choose whether we want to proceed to ROOM 3A or ROOM 3B. Therefore, we have to add multiple transitions using the *ADD TRANSITION* button. The set up transitions for this storyline is presented in the picture below:

The screenshot shows a configuration window titled "Room 2". It has two columns: "TO ROOM" and "BUTTON TEXT". There are two rows of configuration options. The first row has "Room 3A" in the "TO ROOM" column and "I want to review what I've learned" in the "BUTTON TEXT" column. The second row has "Room 3B" in the "TO ROOM" column and "I want to continue with training" in the "BUTTON TEXT" column. To the right of each row are two buttons: a pencil (edit) and a trash can (delete). Below these rows is a blue button labeled "Add transition".

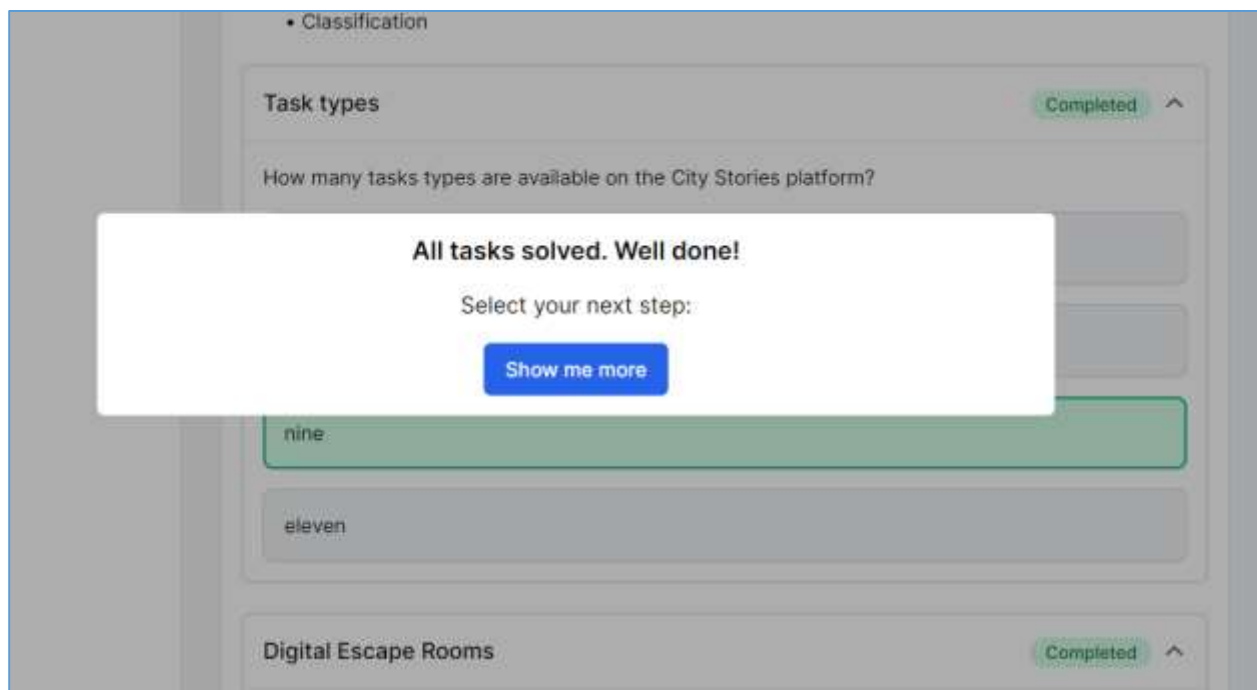
- Similarly, the review room will have an option to transition back to ROOM 2, or proceed to ROOM 4;
- Once you get to the very last room (in this case THE END), you need to add a final transition – "End story". Please note that every storyline must have the "End story" transition, and therefore "End story" will always appear as an option in the drop-down menu.



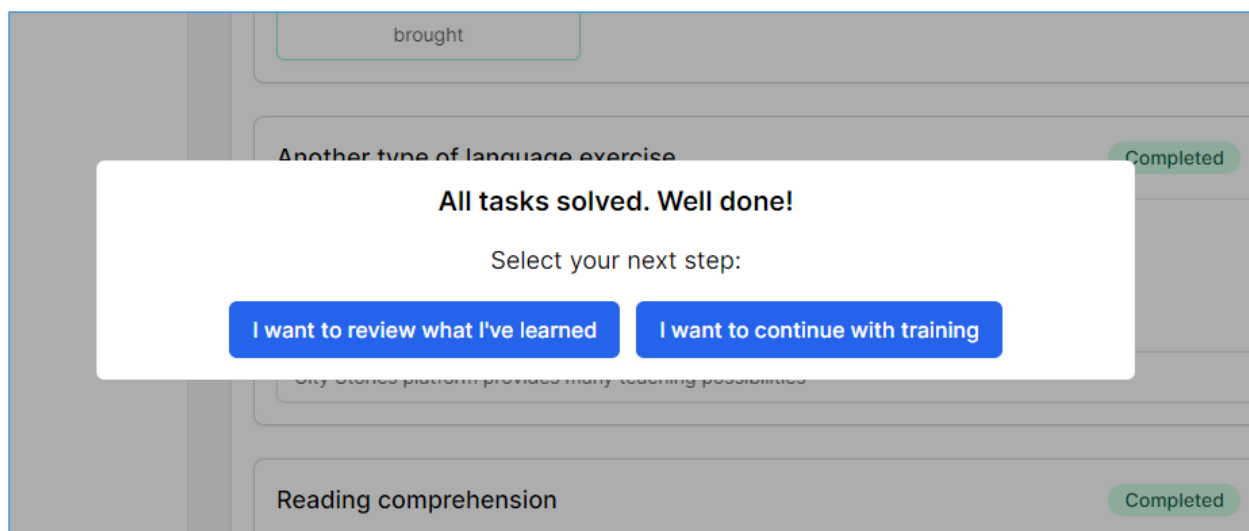
### Previewing a story

Once you have completed the entire story (by adding all content, tasks and creating the storyline), you can preview your work to make sure that everything is set up as planned. To do this, go to the *Preview* tab of your *Story* interface. Please note that the story is always previewed from the beginning and you will have to go through the actual progression, room by room and task by task, in order to review the entire story. To check an individual room, go to that room and use the *Content* and *Task* tabs to navigate into and check a room.

Using the story preview, you can see how the previously defined transition buttons work in a storyline. For example, for our second transition, we entered the transition text "Show me more". Therefore, upon successfully completing all tasks in ROOM 1, we will get the following pop-up window allowing us to proceed to ROOM 2:



Similarly, when we complete all content in ROOM 2, we are offered two choices as defined in our storyline:



### Sharing stories with your students

Your story can be published for public view on the City Stories website (covered in the next section of this chapter). Published stories can be accessed by anyone, even if they are not registered on the City Stories platform. However, you can use your personal, unpublished stories with your students by creating a public link. To do this, simply go to the *Preview* section of the editor and click on the *PUBLIC LINK* button in the top right corner. Your browser will automatically take you to the public link for the story, so you need to copy the link from the browser address bar.

You can now share this link directly with your students or even on your social media. Anyone with this link will be able to access your story, so please make sure your content is appropriate for your audience. Please note that *City Stories* project partners are not responsible for any of the content presented in your stories.

### Publishing your story

As mentioned previously, you can also submit your story for publishing. Before you submit your story for publishing, you need to fill in some additional information. You will find this information in the *Publishing info* tab of your story editor, and there are more details on how to do this in another section of this guide:

- Story pitch – this will be displayed on the public City Stories website. It is basically your way of pitching a story to other teachers and getting them interested in using your story with their learners.
- Lesson plan – this includes the main language aims, suggestions for pre-DER activities, possible follow-up activities and additional comments. Most teachers rely on having a complete lesson plan when applying external learning content and teaching tools in their classrooms. In this case, we are not asking for a detailed CELTA-style lesson plan (including lesson stages and activity durations), but we do want to provide other teachers with ideas for incorporating your story

into their lessons. Therefore, your story needs to have a good lesson plan section in order for it to be considered for publishing;

- Cover photo – upload a photo to go with your story pitch on the City Stories website.

If your story is approved for publishing, it will appear in the appropriate section of the public website. In addition, it will be available to all registered City Stories users in the *Stories* menu item of the platform.

You can also look at the *Publishing history* tab of the story editor for details on your publishing status.

**Please note: you must only use images, text and audio that comply with EU GDPR and copyright law. The project team, partner organisations and their employees bear no responsibility for checking the legality of any images, text or audio used. Publishing a story, and therefore any image, text or audio does not imply such checks have been carried out.**

## A guide to implementing Stories and DERs in language courses

One of the many advantages of working with digital study materials such as City Stories, and the Digital Escape Rooms (DERs) they incorporate, is their extraordinary flexibility. In other words, City Stories can be used in a wide variety of different contexts and delivery modes.

Exactly how teachers should use the Stories will depend on a variety of considerations such as:

- The flexibility of the syllabus
- The amount of time learners have available in the classroom and/or for homework
- The availability of digital devices
- The size of the class
- The range of language skills within the group
- The classroom management skills of teachers
- The learning preferences of students
- Etc.

The following section will summarise some of the ways in which City Stories might be used with a group of adult learners.

### In a traditional classroom context

#### **As a whole group activity**

If there is only one digital device available in the classroom, or if the teacher prefers to have the whole class focused on the same activity at the same time, one option would be to project the DER onto a large screen or whiteboard and have the whole class work through the text and DERs as a group.

This option will only be viable if the students are all able to see the text that is being projected, so it will only work if the group of students is relatively small, or if the screen being used is very large. Similarly, if

the story is delivered as an audio file rather than as a written text, the quality of the sound system will need to be good enough to ensure that all students can hear the audio without difficulty.

The main advantage of working through a DER in this way is that the teacher will be able to ensure that all students are paying attention, and participating in the activity. The teacher will also be able to pause at any point that seems to be causing difficulty (e.g. a colloquial expression or item of vocabulary) and elicit clarification from the whole group.

The teacher could also ask students to take turns reading each section of the story out loud. This will provide the opportunity to help individual learners improve their pronunciation.

### **As a small group activity**

If learners have access to several digital devices (laptop computers, tablet computers, or smartphones) teachers could divide the class into pairs or small groups and ask the students to work through the Stories and DERs together with one or more of their classmates.

The main advantage of this approach is that the learners will need to communicate with each other in order to agree on the meaning of the texts, and the answers to the tasks in the DERs. If the teacher is able to insist that such communication takes place in English (or whatever the target language is) the total amount of effective communication needed will be significant, and could certainly contribute towards developing the students' communication skills. This will add real value to the process of working through the DERs.

Another potential advantage of this approach is that it lends itself to the addition of an element of gamification. So for example, the teacher could set up the DER as a competition between groups. The first group to finish wins ... whatever prize or reward the teacher thinks is most appropriate.

Teachers will of course need to monitor the groups of students as they work through the DER, both to ensure that they are using the target language to communicate with each other, and to provide explanations or other assistance when needed. With a large class (e.g. of 30 students, divided into 10 or more groups) this could be a challenge.

Needless to say if the DER is being delivered as an audio file, students will either need to use headphones, or find a quiet space to work in. Having a dozen or so audio files all being played at the same time through loud speakers will be extremely distracting.

### **As an individual activity**

Assuming all students have access to a suitable digital device, it is conceivable that the class could be asked to work through a DER individually. This might not seem the most logical approach, but it could provide teachers with a useful tool if they need to evaluate how well individual students are able to work with written or audio texts, or resolve the various language tasks contained in the DERs.

### In an online or hybrid class

The main advantage of using digital study materials as part of an online or hybrid class is obviously that some or all of the students will already be working in a digital context. So, by definition, those students who are joining the class online will already have access to a suitable digital device.

Communications platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams are also designed for participants to work with digital materials, so there is no reason to suppose that students won't be able to access the DER that has been selected for the lesson.

As above, teachers may decide to work through the DER as a whole group activity (using the Share screen option on the communications platform), or they may decide to divide the students into smaller groups and put them in so called 'breakout rooms' so that each group can work through the DER at its own pace.

Again, teachers will need to monitor what's happening in the breakout rooms to ensure that students are using the target language to communicate, and to help resolve any issues the students have encountered.

If the breakout room option is chosen, teachers should always try to bring the whole class back into one shared virtual space before the end of the lesson, so the students can provide feedback, and the teacher can make any general comments, or set follow up activities to be completed before the next class.

### For homework

Assuming that all students have access to a suitable digital device, teachers may decide to give students the task of working through a DER for homework.

This could be done either by individual students working on their own, or by 2 or 3 students working together online – always assuming they can coordinate the time needed to do so.

The main advantage of asking students to complete a DER for homework is that it frees up classroom time for other activities that students can't do as easily on their own (an obvious example being the development of speaking skills).

Teachers should bear in mind that students may need 30-40 minutes to work through a single DER, so it's always advisable to give them 2-3 days to complete such a homework assignment.

### Final note

Teachers will also discover that most of the City Stories that have been published to date have suggestions for both pre and post Story activities. These are entirely optional and teachers may well come up with other ideas of their own. But it is always worth considering what pre and post activities to include and how best to include them, before deciding on the best way to use the DER with a class. For example, it may be helpful to conduct a pre-DER activity with the whole class, before dividing the class into smaller groups to work through the DER.

## Guidance on how to evaluate the effectiveness of City Stories

There are two broad categories we should consider when attempting to evaluate how useful City Stories are for our learners. These are:

1. Motivation – did the students enjoy the story? Did they enjoy working through the Digital Escape Rooms? Is this the sort of activity that might encourage them to do some additional reading or listening?
2. Impact – In other words, have the Stories helped our learners improve their language skills and competences?

### Motivation

The answer to the first question is relatively easy to address through a simple, digital questionnaire, such as those provided by Google Forms or specialist apps such as aweform.com

To get a clear idea of how much a specific story has motivated our students we could ask questions using a simple rating scale. Teachers often use a 1-5 scale, where 1 is the minimum score and 5 the maximum, but it may be worth considering a 1-6 scale so that students can't answer with a neutral score. In other words, with a 1-6 scale, the answers have to be either positive to some degree, or negative to some degree, and this can provide useful information.

The sort of questions teachers might ask are:

- Do you think the story was interesting?
- Did you learn anything new about culture or history from the story?
- Did you enjoy working through the different rooms and language tasks?
- Do you think working through the story helped you improve your English?
- Would you like to try another story from our collection?

With data from questions such as these, teachers should quickly be able to identify which of the stories on the platform are the most and least popular with learners.

### Impact

Trying to assess how much a specific story has helped learners improve their English (or other target language) is a much more challenging task, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to do it!

It is a challenging task for various reasons. On the one hand, improving a skill such as listening or reading comprehension is something that happens very gradually, over time. A single reading or listening activity may help to a greater or lesser degree, but the scale of improvement may not be measurable until students have participated in a whole series of similar activities.

At the same time, most students are famously reticent to claim that their language skills are improving, even if they are able to perceive such improvements. But again, that doesn't mean we should avoid asking pertinent questions. By asking students to think about the impact a specific activity has had (such



as working through a DER from start to finish), we may even be able to help students realise that their language skills are improving, even if they are reluctant to recognise the fact.

The sort of question we might consider asking students in this context is:

- Do you think that working through the story and tasks helped you improve your English?

Again a rating system of 1-5 or 1-6 will provide the most useful data, which can later be analysed and compared to data from other classes, or from other stories.

It may also be useful to ask students a question such as this:

- Which of these language skills do you think that working with the story helped you improve most? You can choose as many as you like.
  - Reading comprehension
  - Listening comprehension
  - Vocabulary
  - Verb forms
  - Sentence structure
  - Colloquial expressions

Needless to say the answers can be adapted to each story, so listening comprehension could be eliminated from the options where the story has been presented as written text only.

It may also be interesting to compare the results from such questionnaires when the stories have been studied in different contexts (as outlined in Chapter 7) e.g. as a small group activity in the classroom, or as homework.

### Testing, testing, testing

As mentioned previously, evaluating improvement in broad language skills such as listening or reading comprehension, is very difficult to do after one or two activities, as measurable improvements in generic skills such as these tend to happen very gradually, over time. Fortunately, the Digital Escape Room format of the City Stories Project does a certain amount of evaluation for us, in that students have to complete the tasks they have been assigned – which invariably include activities that focus on comprehension – before they can progress to the next stage of the story. In this way, the DER format is constantly evaluating whether or not the students' reading or listening comprehension skills are at the required level.

Students are also given the opportunity to refer back to the written text, or listen to the appropriate section of the audio file, as often as they want. So if they don't answer the corresponding comprehension questions correctly the first time, they can refer back to the source material and have another go at understanding what the story is telling them. In this respect the tasks in the DERs are following a familiar teach-test-teach-test model.

Even students who can't be bothered to refer back to the story in order to revise their answers should benefit to some extent by reading and then re-reading the comprehension questions.

There is perhaps more scope for evaluating whether or not students have gained new competencies from working through the stories, in other areas such as grammar, and most especially, vocabulary or expressions. To do this, teachers simply need to set up a post-story test or quiz, designed to evaluate whether or not students have learned certain specific language items.

For example, one of the stories from Barcelona is about the city's most famous architect, Antoni Gaudi and, logically enough, includes a number of words and expressions that students may not previously have come across at B1-B2 level. Teachers could set up a simple post-story quiz with multiple choice questions such as:

1. *What was Antoni Gaudi's profession?*

- a) *An archaeologist*
- b) *An engineer*
- c) *An architect*

2. *What is the front of a building called?*

- a) *The terrace*
- b) *The façade*
- c) *The roof*

Or with gap fill questions such as:

*Nature was also a model for the interior of the Sagrada Familia church, where the \_\_\_\_\_ look like tall branching trees.*

Given that each story is unique and is therefore likely to include a range of different language items, testing discrete items such as the examples mentioned above, after students have completed the story – perhaps even a week or two after they have completed the story - will provide teachers with a clear idea of which students have learned which items as a result of working their way through each story.

### Feedback from teachers

People who have contributed their own stories and DERs to the platform will also be interested in receiving feedback from teachers who have used their stories with their learners.

Here is a selection of questions that authors may like to include in a questionnaire designed for teachers. Again, a rating system may be the most useful way of evaluating answers to most of these questions.

- Do you think your students found the story interesting?
- Do you think your students enjoyed the Digital Escape Room format of the activity?
- Do you think your students learnt anything new about culture or history from the activity?
- Do you think working through the story and tasks helped your students improve their language skills?
- Which of these language skills do you think that working with the story helped you improve most? You can choose as many as you like.
  - (Possible answers listed as above.)
- Do you think your students would like to try another story from the collection?
- How much did you learn about culture and history from working with the story?
- To what extent did this activity provide you with new teaching skills and techniques?
- Please rate your overall experience working with the story.
- Would you like to add any comments or suggestions?

Authors who have used their stories privately, or have not yet had their story approved on the City Stories platform may not be able to provide questionnaires of this description to a broad range of teachers, but any feedback, even if it is limited to the teachers working in the same school as the author, should be useful.